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EDUCATIONAL

IN CHARGE OF
ISABEL HAMPTON ROBB

THE PRELIMINARY EDUCATION OF NURSES

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IN looking over the field of nursing and noting the remarkable improvements made in some directions, our attention is drawn to one particular phase of our work in which certain departures have been made from ordinary methods which seem to us significant of tendencies of thought, and as such to be worthy of careful consideration. The changes referred to are the establishment in some schools for nurses of what is called "preliminary training," meaning, briefly, a period set apart for the preparation of the pupil nurse by some preliminary instruction before permitting her to proceed with the further training provided by practical work in the hospital wards. From the fact that these changes have been established in schools widely remote from one another, and without communication or common impulse, it would seem that each school must be responding in its own way to a recognized need in its work.

The first school, so far as we know, to demonstrate the existence of such a need by making provision to meet it was the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, which in January, 1893, established a course of preliminary training extending over a period of three months. This plan of preliminary instruction included courses of lectures and demonstrations in anatomy, physiology, bacteriology, and hygiene, in the principles of therapeutics, in cookery, and in ward work. The course was divided into two parts; the first, consisting of lectures, etc., was delivered at St. Mungo's College; the second and more advanced part was given at the hospital. Entrance upon the second half of the course was conditional upon passing the examinations of the first. The fees for the full course were about five pounds, the pupil providing board and lodging for the three months at her own expense.

In establishing this course of instruction the superintendent of

nurses, Mrs. R. Strong,* referred to her experience in hospital nursing, extending over thirty years, which had made it evident that a pupil requires a certain amount of technical knowledge before she can reap any benefit from the practical part of her work or be of service to others; that the ignorance of a probationer is a dangerous ignorance, greatly lessened by preliminary instruction and training, and that a further advantage is derived from the uniformity of such instruction. Of great importance also was the removal of that serious interference with the proper administration of the work in the wards which resulted from taking away pupils at irregular hours to attend classes and lectures.

A somewhat similar course of training to that which has been outlined above was established at the London Hospital about 1895.† It differs from that of the Glasgow Infirmary in the following points: in length, which was about six weeks; in some of its subjects; in providing board and lodging free of expense, and in the fact that it was expressly stated to be established for a limited number of selected candidates.

Pupil probationers received instruction in and were required to perform such household duties as would subsequently fall to their share when admitted to the wards. These included sweeping, dusting, etc., but no cleaning of grates nor scrubbing. They were expected to become quick and thorough in accomplishing such portions of ward work as would shortly become a part of their daily routine in the hospital. They were also expected to become proficient in sick-room cookery, in bandaging, and in such details of practical nursing as could be taught previous to their actual attendance on the sick. In addition, they were to have the advantage of attending lectures and classes on elementary physiology, anatomy, and hygiene especially arranged for their benefit.‡

This idea was further developed in the Dublin Technical School for Nurses, which was established as a central place where probationer nurses

* "A Plea for Uniformity of Education in Nursing," by Mrs. R. Strong, superintendent of nurses, Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Published in *Trained Nurse*, January, 1895.

† The writer is not informed as to the exact date on which the London Hospital established this course of training, but remembers first hearing of it in the year 1895 as something quite recently inaugurated.

‡ A recent comment upon this system, cut from the *Nursing Record*, may be accepted as some evidence of its value: "Preliminary training for probationers at the London Hospital has proved so successful that the system is now being greatly extended. Tredegar House, Bow Road, where pupils have been received for preliminary instruction in technical details, has failed to meet the demand for such instruction, so the committee has acquired the adjoining house, which will enable all probationers to be received for this teaching before passing into the hospital wards for practical trial."

from all hospitals could attend to receive instruction in anatomy, physiology, hygiene, and cookery, after first passing required examinations in English.*

On this side of the Atlantic we find what seems to be an outgrowth of a similar idea in the School for Nurses at Waltham, Massachusetts. Here the first six months of the three years are set aside for the preparation of the pupil for her practical work later, and are called a probationary period. During the first term of the probationary year instruction is given in anatomy and physiology, in chemistry and hygiene, in the principles and practice of asepsis, in all branches of practical house-keeping, especially housekeeping for the sick, and in the care of infants and convalescents. At the end of six months, probationers who have passed satisfactory examinations and who have proved their efficiency in all of these branches are given nursing service in the wards of the Waltham Hospital. As, in addition, "during the first term of the junior year student nurses are assigned to nursing service in the private practice of their physician-instructors," it is evident that this is not preliminary training in the sense in which it has been established in the schools before referred to. Practical nursing work, done outside of the hospital instead of in it, is apparently performed by the probationer from the date of entrance. This is done partly under supervision and partly without it, as the accompanying extract from the circular will show:

"A distinctive feature of the school is the training given in district visiting nursing. As has already been stated, the probationers are taken out by the superintendent or her assistants to such work, beginning with the more simple cases. Several thousand such visits are made during each year. On these nursing visits they are taught how to wash and dress infants, how to care for lying-in women, how to make clean and comfortable convalescent patients and helpless chronic invalids who either cannot afford or do not need continuous nursing. After the probationer has satisfied her teachers of her ability to do well the nursing service required at one place, she makes the visit by herself on the following days until the patient recovers or until another probationer is taken there to be taught, and she is transferred to a more difficult case."

The course at this hospital cannot, therefore, be considered in any sense an adequate preliminary course.

That some preparatory instruction of the pupil before permitting her to enter upon practical training in the hospital wards is a neces-

* A recent letter from Miss Huxley says, "We have every reason to be pleased with the results."

sity is an idea, then, which has taken definite form in a course of instruction provided for that purpose in three important centres.

It is of further interest to us to see to what degree such ideas may be held by others representative of the nursing profession and competent to judge of its needs. From recent papers and addresses given before our nursing societies we find evidences of the general tendency of thought in such statements as follow: * "There is no present prospect for the nurse of gaining her theoretical knowledge as the young doctor does his before entering the hospital wards. This in itself would be of infinite value, and would render the nurse's work both intelligent and interesting from the outset."

Again we quote: "The time may not have arrived for training-schools in this country to take such a long step in advance as to adopt the plan of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary in giving a preliminary course of instruction. Boards of Trustees might demur at the additional expense, and it might take a good while to educate them to an appreciation of its advantages." †

And again: "A knowledge of housekeeping, so essential in a nurse's work, is so often found lacking in the young women who make application, that until domestic economy becomes a branch of education in our public and private schools I fear we cannot hope for much improvement. The home training is all that can be counted upon, and we know this part is often most sadly neglected. This would seem to be a most important requirement for a course in nursing." ‡

In a recent number of the *London Nursing Record* we note that the necessity for this preliminary training is very strongly urged by Miss Stewart, matron of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, one of the oldest and greatest and most important hospitals in the world. Apart from these publicly expressed views, which the writer has noted in the way in which one always appropriates evidence bearing upon a matter much in one's thoughts, the general concensus of private opinion has almost invariably been, "It is an excellent idea, but how can we carry it out?"

The natural and inevitable inference from these statements is that existing methods of instruction in hospital training-schools have proved unsatisfactory in this particular direction and are in need of reform. The methods in general use in these schools at present conform very

* "How to Prepare Nurses for the Duties of Alumnae," by Miss Lucy Walker, superintendent of nurses, Pennsylvania Hospital, before the Superintendents' Society. *Nursing Record*, April 15, 1899.

† "Uniformity in Methods of Teaching Ward Work," by Miss Riddle, Boston City Hospital. (1898.)

‡ "What has been accomplished towards a Uniform Curriculum," by Miss M. W. McKechnie, superintendent of nurses, New York Infirmary for Women.

little to such as have been accepted as intelligent and effective in other educational institutions of somewhat similar scope and purpose. The school for nurses claims standing-room among schools whose purpose it is to teach a profession, precisely as the medical schools teaches its graduates to practise medicine, or the law school prepares its graduates for admission to the bar. The scope of such a school is bounded only by the largest conception of the requirements of that profession, by the aspirations and ability of its faculty, and the means at their disposal. All professional schools, therefore, having largely one purpose, it may be assumed that they should possess a certain general similarity of methods, such as definite requirements for admission, and such a graded arrangement of the subjects of instruction that the student may be carried forward in his studies from year to year in an orderly and logical way. Requirements for admission to all professional schools vary greatly in the different professions and in different schools of the same profession, but they are the subject of continual agitation and continual improvement. Not only is it demanded that the applicant for admission to great professional schools shall have a good foundation in general education, or, better still, a college degree, but that he shall have been in some way prepared for the professional school by studies which are directly preliminary, and the tendency of schools and colleges is to so prepare the student by electives. The college degree in an applicant for admission to a medical school may in fact stand not only for general preparatory knowledge, but also for special attainments in the line of biology, physics, and chemistry, all leading up to practical work and having an important bearing on his future career. In a proper and logical system of education the acquisition of new knowledge must depend to a considerable extent on what has been previously acquired.

How far do training-schools for nurses conform to the requirements of such a system? What are our requirements for admission? What are our methods of instruction? An inspection of such circulars as are furnished by our schools for the information and instruction of applicants shows plainly that we have few arbitrary requirements of any kind, and these relate mainly to age, size, and physical conditions. Stress is usually and wisely laid upon good character as an essential, but upon the important point of educational qualifications or attainments, such as might reasonably be supposed to prepare one for a profession, there is a silence which speaks louder than words. Among the sixteen to eighteen questions of which an average application-blank may be composed, a brief "where educated?" may be all that suggests to the applicant that any educational qualification is necessary or even desirable. Here and there an effort has been made to establish

a definite standard by a statement that applicants must pass certain prescribed examinations before or after admission, but these are neither uniform nor general, nor do they extend in any case beyond the range of the simplest elementary knowledge afforded by a common-school education. The last word on the subject of educational requirements proper is said when we remind those who apply that women of superior education and cultivation will be preferred. We realize, to be sure, that many do not concede the claims which nursing makes to be ranked among the professions, and to them and others the possession of a "superior education" is neither necessary nor desirable. One may pause here just long enough to remind those holding these opinions that they are not new, but have been held at various times concerning every one even of those professions which we now justly call learned—theology, law, medicine, the scientific professions, and teaching. Thirty-five years ago, says President Eliot, some of the medical students could hardly write, so that the taking of notes was difficult for them. It is at present our conviction that neither the public generally nor even the governing bodies of schools for nurses have yet come to any adequate appreciation of what may reasonably be expected from the nursing profession, and hence arises some of the difficulties met with in our efforts to improve present conditions. Until there is a clearer and more general understanding of the possibilities which the work of nursing holds, we shall be unable to advance appreciably our present requirements for admission. It is also to be steadily borne in mind that a school for nurses does not merely teach and train as many properly qualified candidates as its size, equipment, and teaching force permit. It carries on the nursing work of the hospital, and has the responsibility of keeping up at all times for the necessary work of the hospital a certain specified number of pupils. So long as these conditions exist, requirements, being governed by imperative considerations, must remain in a measure adjustable. Of equal importance also stands the fact that the education of the average candidate is a mere chaos of information of little value to herself or to anybody else. Of those matters which most nearly concern us in every-day life she is pitiably ignorant, having been systematically shielded from every trial or difficulty, often even from the necessity of making an effort of any kind which she did not choose to make. Even when she does not lack natural mental capacity, the ability to use her hands to any satisfactory purpose, to accomplish definite results in any direction, has been almost universally found wanting. It goes without saying that the higher qualities, judgment, self-control, habitual decisiveness, discretion, an understanding of the dignity of labor, are largely undeveloped. Such preliminary education as would qualify one aright for the

work of nursing the sick is hard to find anywhere. We are educated in a general way by every circumstance and condition of our own lives from the day of our birth, and the nature and extent of this education are as powerful factors in determining our fitness for responsibilities as any accumulation of facts acquired through the indirect medium of books. "Studies," says Lord Bacon, "do give forth directions too much at large unless they be bounded in by experience," and he adds, "there is a wisdom about them and above them won by observation."

It speaks volumes for the educating power of the school of nursing that from such untrained and wrongly educated material (always the best that offers) there are finally sent forth so many capable, thoughtful, skilful women who ultimately become useful to the community and a credit to the profession. The business of the school for nurses, however, is to teach the work of nursing, and its definite responsibilities should begin and end somewhere. While clearly at present it is our duty to take the best which comes, and to supply as far as possible a training in the school which the applicants should have received before coming to it, and which is the only foundation upon which we can build, we should not be unmindful of the necessity of continuing our efforts to advance the standards of requirements for admission, and to relieve the school of a task of extraordinary difficulty by including among these qualifications much that now forms a part of the course of instruction. A comparison of our methods of instruction with those of other schools shows remarkable points of difference. There must be a best way of mastering any subject, and while each presents its own peculiar difficulties, to be met by special provisions and measures, yet this cannot be so utterly unlike others as to form no part of any system or group or to find in the general scheme of education no teaching or training which may serve as a guide. If it be suggested that the nature of this subject is so different from others that methods may be wisely and safely employed in its teaching which would not be so considered if applied to other subjects, we must reply that facts as we know them do not corroborate such a belief. By our present methods the pupil, with few suitable qualifications, no previous study, no preliminary training, is brought at once into the practical side of her work. A great amount of practical work is placed upon the pupil long before she has been prepared by definite or systematic instruction. Immediately upon entrance she is placed at totally unfamiliar domestic duties requiring careful and exact performance, and involving an appreciation quite above the common of the necessity and importance of such duties. She prepares and serves foods and receives her instruction in this most important subject months afterwards. She has been taught nothing about the choice of suitable

and nourishing materials, their careful preparation and economical use, the art which is required in feeding a sick or helpless patient, and the observation necessary to note changes in the appetite and quantity of food consumed by the patients, all of which demand from the very beginning an amount of knowledge, care, and thought far beyond what is possessed by a young pupil nurse. We find her, further, administering medicines and learning how she ought to administer them and what effects to observe possibly weeks or months later. She begins early the personal care of her patient, with its countless details and its countless possibilities of danger to him through her ignorance of what she is handling. Some previous study of anatomy and physiology might not only prevent possible errors, but would have the further value of making her work comprehensible from the beginning and of avoiding the establishment of wrong or confused ideas.

That these statements are absolutely correct will be seen from statistics taken at random from the recently published reports of methods of instruction in several of our representative schools. In eleven out of twenty of these schools we find *materia medica* taught in the second year; in six it does not come until the third year; yet those familiar with the training of nurses know that the pupil may begin her practical handling of drugs within two months after admission. Dietetics are taught sometimes in the second year, sometimes in the third. Anatomy and physiology, while more uniformly a feature of the first year's teaching, are yet to be found both in the second and third years. It is reasonable to infer that the pupils have obtained the practical part of their instruction with much less advantage than if they had received some systematic preparation for it. Among the arguments in favor of this method we find it stated that the pupil is always taught individually by a head nurse or senior nurse before being allowed to perform any act of work. In a busy hospital ward this is frequently quite impossible, and the statement is one which after some years of experience and observation the writer is unable to accept; even were it true, such a method would be a poor substitute for careful, thorough, and systematic preparatory teaching.

A moment's consideration of such a system as now prevails shows its crudity and weakness. It is no argument to say that a pupil can quite well acquire the little necessary knowledge of the principles of her work as she goes along. She can acquire them much better before she goes along, and her going will inevitably be attended with more benefit to herself and to the patient, and with considerably less chance of injury to him. Beyond all question practical skill is the thing, and all instruction must have constant reference to practical ends. But this

should be preceded by an understanding of some of the principles and an acquaintance with some of the facts.

Our methods, while containing much that is admirable, have never grown beyond the stage of infancy. What was done of necessity years ago in the effort to provide better nursing in hospitals is now continued partly as a measure of economy, and partly through indolent adherence to a custom which saves us the trouble of thinking.

To lengthen courses of instruction and increase the number of subjects taught, or to show long and elaborate schedules of lectures, does not necessarily mean that we are thereby greatly advancing in the education of nurses. It is equally important that there shall be a wise division of theory and practice, and such an arrangement of each that practical work shall in all instances be preceded by previous study.

A system whereby the pupil is prepared to some extent for the practical side of her work by previous study and preparation is founded on a rational basis, and it is in this direction that the writer believes the greatest improvement will come about in the teaching of nurses. This method may for us have the stamp of novelty, but it is in accordance with existing methods in every other branch of education, every art, trade, or profession. Is it not time to bring methods of teaching nurses in training-schools into harmony with those employed in other branches of education?

PREPARATORY SCHOOL FOR NURSES

By ANNIE M. SHIELS

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THE State Hospital at Hazleton, Pennsylvania, opened a Preparatory Training-School for nurses in 1893. The hospital was built to take care of the injured of the Middle Coal Fields of Pennsylvania. In order to admit a patient there has to be a history of an injury of some kind; that being the rule, all medical cases are excluded. The rules also exclude women; occasionally there is one admitted who can be accommodated in the one private room at the hospital, but not sufficient in number to afford proper training for the nurses.

The course of training in the Preparatory School is one year, after which time the pupils are expected to enter a general school for nurses to finish their training. The greatest difficulty was to find pupils with the necessary efficiency and ability. At first there was not any arrangement made with other hospitals to accept the pupils after their year was